

# Heber Creeper Railroad Ride A Wild, Nostalgic Journey

31 July 1971 - 131

By JAN PADFIELD

Deseret News Staff Writer

HEBER CITY — Gov. Calvin L. Rampton, wearing a blue railroader's cap and jaunty blue scarf, had a ball riding the Heber Creeper through Provo Canyon Friday on a special "Governor's Day" excursion.

"I am delighted with what they have done with the train and it appears to be a financial success," he said. "If it continues, I will not hesitate to ask the state to build the necessary overpass in Provo Canyon at the state's expense."

He said the Creeper is not a major industry at this time, "but neither is anything else, and it takes all of these recreational activities working together to attract tourists to the state."

## OFFICIALS RODE

Close to 100 city, county and state officials boarded the train in Heber for the 3-hour trip to Bridal Veil Falls and back.

Among them were Henry C. Helland, state director of highways; James Moyle and Harold B. Tippetts of the Utah Park and Recreation Division; members of the Public Service Commission; Salt Lake City Commissioners Conrad B. Harrison and E. J. Garn; Heber City Mayor Harry C. McMillan and



Harvey Murdock, Don Hoggan, Curt Ashton render "Wasatch Cannon Ball."

mayors and town council members from most Wasatch Front towns.

## INDIANS ATTACK

During the journey some Indians staged a raid on the train and later bandits attempted a holdup, but the train outran them. Just before the Creeper reached the Heber depot, 20 horsemen swooped down and abducted the hostesses from the train and rode off with them.

Rampton left the train at

Bridal Veil Falls to return to Salt Lake City and prepare for the upcoming special session of the Legislature.

## 200 RIDE DAILY

Lowe Ashton, president of Wasatch Mountain Railway Co., said "We exceed 200 passengers daily and 500 a day on weekends. We're facing turn-away crowds, even with the two additional cars we have ordered."

The recreational train, pow-

ered by antique engines, makes two runs daily on weekends and holidays at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and one run on weekdays at 1:30 p.m. The train does not run on Tuesdays. The trip starts from the restored depot on Center Street in Heber. Price is \$3.50 for adults and \$1.75 for children.

Since it began operation less than a month ago it has hauled more than 5,000 paying passengers.

Another said there is good comfortable individual seating. "We could increase the capacity if we put in our double benches down the aisles, but we aren't convinced that's good business," he said.

Ashton believes the success is in the unique appeal of the old train, the spectacular scenery, the capable crew (all "old timers," either in actual railroad working experience, or through many hours of work in the railroad buff associations), the entertainers, Don Hoggan, Harvey Murdock and Curt Ashton who play guitars and sing railroad and folk songs, and six attractive hostesses, college coeds Carol Ritchie, JaLynn Rasmussen, Teresa Ellertson, Laurel Mahoney, Susan Ashton and Rosemary Zufelt. Chief engineers are Clarence Stirlingham, a retired engineer and Charles Nielsen, Jr., who is a locomotive engineer by vocation and hobby. His father is alternate engineer.

## LOVE TO HELP

"Also, people enjoy participation. We're thinking of putting in a turntable so passengers can help turn a 120-ton engine. There are times when unknowing fishermen have parked across the tracks, and the passengers get out and help the crew move the autos. They love it!"

See CREEPER on Page B-2

# Creeper Ride A Scenic Trip

Continued from Page B-1

More than one frantic fisherman has come up over the banks of the Provo River in response to our whistle shouting, "I'll move it, I'll move it!"

The "Iron Horse Trail" through the "Alps of Utah" is a dream come true for Ashton and a handful of Heber Valley businessmen and the railroad clubs. They convinced the governor and Legislature of its merits and in June the State Park and Recreation Department purchased the railroad right-of-way through Provo Canyon from the State Road Commission for \$125,000.

To date, the operation has six antique steam engines, open air cars, closed cars, a baggage car converted to restrooms and snack bar facilities and a caboose.

During the "good years," back at the turn of the century, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Company did a tremendous business on the small line. It carried more freight, lumber, sheep, wool, livestock, commodities and people than any railroad of its size in the

nation.

The railroad was completed Sept. 29, 1899. Two trains arrived and departed the depot every day, connecting at Provo with continental trains both east and west.

"If you have business in Salt Lake you can take the 6:40 a.m. train — arrive in the city at 10 o'clock; returning you can leave Salt Lake at 5 p.m. and arrive in Heber at 8:05 a.m. This gives you seven hours in the metropolis and the whole of the business day in the city" said the Wasatch Wave, local publication, under the headline: "Heber Now in Touch with Outside World."

Truck transportation and the convenience of modern automobile cut into the railroad's business so that by 1963 only one train came into the valley each week and later only on an "as needed" basis. Finally, the railroad company got out of business there entirely, selling the right of way to the State Road Commission.

But the Heber Creeper holds fond memories for a lot of people. Older residents remember the gala excursions to resorts in Provo Canyon, and the scenic sights as the Creeper passed crags and cliffs and pine forests and waterfalls along the Provo River.



Some of the memories are more irritating than pleasant. The train stopped where and when it pleased and crept along at a snail's pace, oblivious to the honking of cars. Everybody called it (among other things) the Heber Creeper.

Then there was the time one summer day back in the 1920s when the Creeper and the Interurban, an electric train which ran between Payson and Salt Lake City, ran into each other on the corner of 2nd West and Center Street in Provo. Neither train had an iron-clad schedule.

One chapter in the history of the Creeper goes like this: There was a small boy (nobody seems to remember his name) who was a victim of a crippling disease. He lived with his mother in a small apartment facing the Creeper tracks at First South and Second West.

No matter how early or how late the Creeper passed his window, the boy was there to wave at the trainmen who would ring the bell and blow the whistle for his enjoyment. This daily exchange of greeting ripened into a deep friendship and when Christmas came that year, back in the 1940's, the crew of the Creeper joined Santa in presenting the boy with an electric train. J. W. Wernz, 557 W. 200 So., Provo, remembers that he and Santa delivered the train right from the Creeper that Christmas Eve. Wernz is retired now after many years as conductor on the Heber Creeper.



Heber Creeper pauses at scenic Bridal Veil Falls in Provo Canyon before start of return run to Heber during special "Governor's Day" excursion Friday.

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## Rampton on the Rails

# Huff-Puff 'Heber Creeper' Lures Special Rider

31 July 1971

By Steve Wayda

Tribune Staff Writer

HEBER CITY — Gov. Calvin L. Rampton briefly returned to the days of railroading's golden age Friday as he rode through Provo Canyon aboard the "Heber Creeper."

It was reminiscent of the early 1900s as old engine Number 35 pulled the four cars of visiting dignitaries along the route once vital to the economic and livestock development of Utah.

The governor, clad in a railroader's striped hat and blue scarf, was joined by about 80 others for the "Governor's Day" ride from Heber City to Bridal Veil Falls and return. On board for the 3½-hour trip were most Wasatch County mayors, Salt Lake City Commissioners Conrad B. Harrison and E. J. 'Jake' Garn, and State Highway Director Henry Helland. Gov. Rampton departed the train at

Bridal Veil Falls and returned to Salt Lake City to prepare bills for the upcoming special legislative session.

Conductor Paul Keefer signaled the old locomotive to pull out of the Heber City depot to begin the governor's first ride on the historic train. The old engine steamed through Heber Valley over tracks that once helped make the town one of the west's largest sheep shipping centers.

Its whistle blowing, the old train rumbled and bumped past Deer Creek Reservoir into wooded Provo Canyon towards the falls 18 miles below.

The Wasatch Mountain Railway train appeared to capture the imagination of the young aboard and rekindle memories of the oldsters as it wound down the majestic canyon.

As the crew played guitars and mandolins, and hostesses sang, the governor and hostess JaLynn Rasmussen danced

to a railroad tune in the baggage car. The passengers joined the singing, clapping hands to the music as the crew sang ballads.

Lowe Ashton, company president, said the trip was to show the governor the results of what area residents have done to restore the old railway and to thank him for the opportunity to try the venture.

Gov. Rampton said he was delighted with the ride, but was even more delighted that tourist attraction appears to be a financial success.

Mr. Ashton said the train has been operating at its 250-passenger capacity the past several days and drawing more tourist into the Heber area than expected. The train's initial run was July 10.

## Bond Sign Stays; City, County Dispute Legality

A U.S. Savings Bond sign, erected on the lawn of the county side of the City and County Building a week ago, remained standing Friday despite an order from the City Commission that it be removed.

City commissioners had ruled the sign, which urges the purchase of savings bonds, violates city zoning ordinances.

Friday, when Salt Lake City crews arrived to dismantle the sign, they were halted by County Commissioner Philip R. Blomquist. He told them the Salt Lake County Attorney's Office doesn't believe there is a violation.

Meanwhile, John T. Nielsen, assistant city attorney, said the matter had been discussed by the city attorney's office. "We feel the city has laws that require one government unit to abide by another's rulings, especially in zoning matters," he declared.

He said it was his opinion the sign violates the city laws, but it was not torn down because the county threatened to arrest anyone who removed it.

"To avoid any confrontation, the city has not yet removed the sign and we are trying to determine if criminal charges should be filed," said Mr. Nielsen. "We plan to do something next week to get the matter settled."



Aboard the Heber Creeper, Gov. Calvin L. Rampton wears a rail-

roadman's cap and scarf as he views Deer Creek Reservoir.